

**SYSTEM, METHOD, AND COMPUTER PROGRAM PRODUCT  
FOR DETERMINING WALL THICKNESS IN GRAPHIC MODEL**

**TECHNICAL FIELD OF THE INVENTION**

5 [0001] The present invention is directed, in general, to object modeling tools and processes.

**BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION**

10 [0002] Computer-aided design and modeling (CAD/CAM) have become an integral part of the process for designing and manufacturing any number of components. By designing, modeling, and revising the components in a data processing system, the product can be visualized and optimized as it is being developed to ensure a correct design before any 15 actual manufacturing takes place.

[0003] The ability to quickly modify the shape and dimensions of the modeled object is a great advantage during this process. In order to ensure that a product is properly modeled, every dimension must be verified.

20 [0004] Wall thickness check is an important and obvious requirement in product part design. But it is also an often neglected area due to limited availability of an efficient and robust application to perform this check. Wall thickness of a product is very critical in 25 manufacturing and product quality for plastic part and casting part (e.g. engine) design. An efficient tool for automatically checking the wall thickness and finding the minimum and maximum wall thickness is in high demand.

However, the current solutions in this area are far too much time consuming and without sufficient accuracy.

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[0005] There is, therefore, a need in the art for a system, method, and computer program product for efficiently and accurately measuring wall thickness in a graphic model.

**SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION**

5 [0006] Disclosed is a system, method, and computer program product for measuring wall thickness. After an internal body topology of the model is generated, the topology is traversed between wall elements to determine wall thickness.

10 [0007] The foregoing has outlined rather broadly the features and technical advantages of the present invention so that those skilled in the art may better understand the detailed description of the invention that follows. Additional features and advantages of the invention will be described hereinafter that form the subject of the claims of the invention. Those skilled in the art will appreciate that they may readily use the conception and the specific 15 embodiment disclosed as a basis for modifying or designing other structures for carrying out the same purposes of the present invention. Those skilled in the art will also realize that such equivalent constructions do not depart from the spirit and scope of the invention in its broadest 20 form.

25 [0008] Before undertaking the DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION below, it may be advantageous to set forth definitions of certain words or phrases used throughout this patent document: the terms "include" and "comprise," as well as derivatives thereof, mean inclusion without limitation; the term "or" is inclusive, meaning and/or; the phrases "associated with" and "associated therewith," as well as derivatives thereof, may mean to include, be included within, interconnect with, contain, be contained 30 within, connect to or with, couple to or with, be

communicable with, cooperate with, interleave, juxtapose, be proximate to, be bound to or with, have, have a property of, or the like; and the term "controller" means any device, system or part thereof that controls at least one operation, whether such a device is implemented in hardware, firmware, software or some combination of at least two of the same. It should be noted that the functionality associated with any particular controller may be centralized or distributed, whether locally or remotely.

10 Definitions for certain words and phrases are provided throughout this patent document, and those of ordinary skill in the art will understand that such definitions apply in many, if not most, instances to prior as well as future uses of such defined words and phrases.

**BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS**

[0009] For a more complete understanding of the present invention, and the advantages thereof, reference is now made to the following descriptions taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, wherein like numbers designate like objects, and in which:

[0010] **Figure 1** depicts a block diagram of a data processing system in which a preferred embodiment can be implemented;

[0011] **Figure 2** depicts a flowchart of a process in accordance with a preferred embodiment;

[0012] **Figure 3** depicts an exemplary 2D surface mesh result;

[0013] **Figure 4** depicts an exemplary 3D volume mesh result;

[0014] **Figure 5** depicts an exemplary section view from a 3D volume mesh result;

[0015] **Figure 6** depicts an example of traversing through a 3D volume mesh;

[0016] **Figure 7** depicts an example of the 3D grid mapping approach;

[0017] **Figure 8** depicts an exemplary section view from a 3D grid mapping result;

[0018] **Figures 9-12** depict an example of traversing through a 3D grid mapping;

[0019] **Figure 13** depicts a flowchart of a process in accordance with a preferred embodiment; and

[0020] **Figure 14** depicts an example of increasing the number of sample points.

**DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION**

[0021] Figures 1 through 14, discussed below, and the various embodiments used to describe the principles of the present invention in this patent document are by way of illustration only and should not be construed in any way to limit the scope of the invention. Those skilled in the art will understand that the principles of the present invention may be implemented in any suitably arranged device. The numerous innovative teachings of the present application will be described with particular reference to the presently preferred embodiment.

[0022] Disclosed is a system, method, and computer program product for measuring wall thickness. After an internal body topology of the model is generated, the topology is traversed between wall elements to determine wall thickness.

[0023] Figure 1 depicts a block diagram of a data processing system in which a preferred embodiment can be implemented. The data processing system depicted includes a processor 102 connected to a level two cache/bridge 104, which is connected in turn to a local system bus 106. Local system bus 106 may be, for example, a peripheral component interconnect (PCI) architecture bus. Also connected to local system bus in the depicted example are a main memory 108 and a graphics adapter 110.

[0024] Other peripherals, such as local area network (LAN) / Wide Area Network / Wireless (e.g. WiFi) adapter 112, may also be connected to local system bus 106. Expansion bus interface 114 connects local system bus 106

to input/output (I/O) bus 116. I/O bus 116 is connected to keyboard/mouse adapter 118, disk controller 120, and I/O adapter 122.

[0025] Also connected to I/O bus 116 in the example shown is audio adapter 124, to which speakers (not shown) may be connected for playing sounds. Keyboard/mouse adapter 118 provides a connection for a pointing device (not shown), such as a mouse, trackball, trackpointer, etc.

[0026] Those of ordinary skill in the art will appreciate that the hardware depicted in **Figure 1** may vary for particular. For example, other peripheral devices, such as an optical disk drive and the like, also may be used in addition or in place of the hardware depicted. The depicted example is provided for the purpose of explanation only and is not meant to imply architectural limitations with respect to the present invention.

[0027] A data processing system in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention includes an operating system employing a graphical user interface. The operating system permits multiple display windows to be presented in the graphical user interface simultaneously, with each display window providing an interface to a different application or to a different instance of the same application. A cursor in the graphical user interface may be manipulated by a user through the pointing device. The position of the cursor may be changed and/or an event, such as clicking a mouse button, generated to actuate a desired response.

[0028] One of various commercial operating systems, such as a version of Microsoft Windows™, a product of Microsoft Corporation located in Redmond, Wash. may be employed if suitably modified. The operating system is modified or created in accordance with the present invention as described.

[0029] **Figure 2** depicts a flowchart of a process for checking wall thickness in accordance with a preferred embodiment. A more detailed description of several steps appears below.

[0030] According to a preferred process, a graphic model is loaded in a data processing system (**step 205**). It is important to note that this can include loading a file that includes a specification of the model parameters, whether or not the model is displayed to a user. Similarly, nothing is necessarily displayed to the user as other steps are performed.

[0031] Next, the system will generate a surface mesh on the faces of the model (**step 210**).

[0032] The system will then generate an internal body topology corresponding to the surface mesh (**step 215**).

[0033] The system will identify a first 2D element in a first wall side (**step 220**). Next, the system will traverse the internal body topology (**step 225**), until it identifies a second 2D element in a second wall side (**step 230**).

[0034] The system will then measure the distance between the first and second elements (**step 235**), thereby efficiently and accurately determining the wall thickness.

The wall thickness, corresponding to the measured distance, is stored (**step 240**).

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[0035] The step of generating the 2D surface mesh on the faces of the product model is performed using methods known to those of skill in the art. An exemplary 2D surface mesh result is shown in **Figure 3**.

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[0036] The thickness is then found, as described above, through measuring the distance between two small elements of the surface mesh on each side of the wall. The two elements are found by performing spatial traversal through the internal body topology from one element on the surface mesh to the other side of the wall. Since the spatial traversal is guided by the internal body topology, the spatial traversal can be assured that a shortest path is used.

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[0037] According to at least some embodiments, two approaches are used for generating internal body topology. These are 3D volume meshing (tetrahedron type) and 3D grid mapping, both of which are known to those of skill in the art.

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[0038] A 3D volume mesh will be generated after the 2D surface mesh has been generated. An exemplary 3D volume mesh result is shown in **Figure 4**.

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[0039] Traversing through the internal body topology method is to assure a shortest search path for finding two thickness 2D mesh elements. **Figure 5** is an exemplary section view from a 3D volume mesh result, corresponding to **Figure 4**.

[0040] Traversing through the 3D volume mesh method is shown in **Figure 6**. Guided by the face normal at a point projected from a point on the surface element 605, and the topology of the tetrahedral elements in the mesh, the thickness pair 2D surface elements 605 and 610 are found within the shortest path 620. The thickness 615 can then be measured.

[0041] 3D grid mapping is another approach for generating the body internal topology. This approach is to create 3D grids for defining small cubes encompassing the product body conceptually. Each of the 2D surface mesh elements is then mapped into the corresponding cubes. All cubes that have association with any surface elements are maintained in a tree structure for efficient spatial traversal. An example of the 3D grid mapping approach is shown in **Figure 7**.

[0042] **Figure 8** is an exemplary section view from a 3D grid mapping result, corresponding to **Figure 7**. The mapping cubes that have elements residing in them are maintained in a tree data structure for high-speed searching. Given a point in space, the tree data structure will return a corresponding mapping cube encompassing the point in an efficient manner. The searching algorithm reduces the searching problem from a n-squared order problem to a  $n \log(n)$  order problem. For example, for an array of one million objects maintained in a binary tree data structure, an object can be found in less than 8 searches.

[0043] Traversing through 3D grid mapping is illustrated in **Figures 9-12**. The spatial traversal within the 3D grid

mapping topology process is as described below, with reference also to the flowchart of **Figure 13**.

[0044] The traversal starts from the cube in which the first 2D surface mesh element resides (**step 1305**), as shown in **Figure 9**.  
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[0045] Next, for any point on the 2D surface mesh element at which the thickness is to be found, project it onto the corresponding face of the product model (**step 1310**). Then, find the face normal of the projected point  
10 on the face (**step 1315**), as shown in **Figure 11**.

[0046] Next, guided by the face normal, and optionally a region defined by the range of angle, propagate the search for the other thickness pair element through the spatial location of the cubes (**step 1320**), as shown in  
15 **Figures 9 and 10**. Only the surface elements residing in the cubes within the range are included for the search. Therefore, the amount of time required for the search is greatly reduced.

[0047] The traversal stops when the other thickness pair element is found (**step 1325**). There will have to be no intersection with the other 2D surface elements for the thickness line joining the first projected point and the point on the other thickness pair element, as shown in  
20 **Figure 12**.

25 [0048] Finally, the system will project the point found on the other thickness pair element onto the face of the product model (**step 1330**).

[0049] After the traverse has been made and the second element identified, the distance can be measured as described above (step 1335).

5 [0050] To increase accuracy even further, the system will increase the sampling points for the thickness measure.

10 [0051] There are two methods to increase the density of sampling points for measuring thickness, 1) increase the number of surface mesh elements by reducing the overall element size; and 2) increase the number of sampling points within each mesh element without reducing the overall element size.

15 [0052] In the first method, a new surface mesh needs to be regenerated. This approach is more costly on time consumption. While the second method just adds more sampling points based on the existing mesh, it avoids regenerating mesh. **Figure 14** depicts a few of the schemes in creating more sampling points for each mesh element. The more the number of the sampling points, the more 20 accurate the thickness results would be. The process described above is repeated to find the thickness for the new sampling points if needed.

25 [0053] The preferred embodiments enable a wall-thickness measurement that is much more efficient and accurate than known methods. For example, the known "Medial Axis" method for determining wall thickness calculates the medial surface using an approximation algorithm for the product body. Therefore, the method is less accurate and time

consuming. In addition, the algorithm will often fail on many very complex parts.

5 [0054] The preferred embodiments provide methods for directly measuring the thickness between two 2D surface mesh elements of product face, so results obtained will be much more accurate. Since traversal through body internal topology in finding thickness mesh elements is used, shortest searching path is assured, and hence performance will be very high.

10 [0055] A significant difference between the disclosed embodiments and known techniques is that the wall thickness results determined by the disclosed process will be independent of corner area in the product model. The results from the other methods, like the medial axis approach, will be worse at corner area.

15 [0056] Those skilled in the art will recognize that, for simplicity and clarity, the full structure and operation of all data processing systems suitable for use with the present invention is not being depicted or described herein. Instead, only so much of a data processing system as is unique to the present invention or necessary for an understanding of the present invention is depicted and described. The remainder of the construction and operation of data processing system may conform to any of the various 20 current implementations and practices known in the art.

25 [0057] It is important to note that while the present invention has been described in the context of a fully functional system, those skilled in the art will appreciate that at least portions of the mechanism of the present

invention are capable of being distributed in the form of a  
instructions contained within a machine usable medium in  
any of a variety of forms, and that the present invention  
applies equally regardless of the particular type of  
5 instruction or signal bearing medium utilized to actually  
carry out the distribution. Examples of machine usable  
mediums include: nonvolatile, hard-coded type mediums such  
as read only memories (ROMs) or erasable, electrically  
programmable read only memories (EEPROMs), user-recordable  
10 type mediums such as floppy disks, hard disk drives and  
compact disk read only memories (CD-ROMs) or digital  
versatile disks (DVDs), and transmission type mediums such  
as digital and analog communication links.

15 [0058] Although an exemplary embodiment of the present  
invention has been described in detail, those skilled in  
the art will understand that various changes,  
substitutions, variations, and improvements of the  
invention disclosed herein may be made without departing  
20 from the spirit and scope of the invention in its broadest  
form. For example, while product models are discussed in  
detail herein, the disclosed techniques can be applied to  
any type of graphical or finite element model.

25 [0059] None of the description in the present  
application should be read as implying that any particular  
element, step, or function is an essential element which  
must be included in the claim scope: THE SCOPE OF PATENTED  
SUBJECT MATTER IS DEFINED ONLY BY THE ALLOWED CLAIMS.  
Moreover, none of these claims are intended to invoke  
30 paragraph six of 35 USC §112 unless the exact words "means  
for" are followed by a participle.